

MANCHAC PASS, ON MISSISSIPPI RIVER.

LETTER

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF WAR,

IN RESPONSE

To a resolution of the House calling for information in relation to the nature of the obstructions in the Bayou Manchac, Mississippi river.

MARCH 16, 1860.—Laid on the table, and ordered to be printed.

WAR DEPARTMENT, *March 14, 1860.*

SIR: I have the honor to transmit herewith a report of the chief topographical engineer, with its enclosure, communicating the only information that can be found in this department on the subject of the resolution of the House of Representatives of the 16th ultimo, by which "the Secretary of War is requested to furnish the House of Representatives with copies of any orders which may be on file in his department of General Andrew Jackson, or any officer acting under his directions, or under the authority of the United States, during the war with Great Britain, of 1812, closing the communication between the Gulf of Mexico and Mississippi river, by placing obstructions in the Pass Manchac, to prevent the passage of British troops and munitions of war through that channel from the Gulf to the Mississippi river; also any other information in reference to closing said pass, by authority of the government, which may be on file in the war office."

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

W R. DRINKARD,
Acting Secretary of War.

Hon. WILLIAM PENNINGTON,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

BUREAU OF TOPOGRAPHICAL ENGINEERS,
Washington, March 1, 1860.

SIR: In reply to the resolution of the House of Representatives of the 16th February, 1860, referred to this bureau for report, I have

the honor to transmit herewith a copy of the report of the late Captain T. B. Linnard, corps topographical engineers, in relation to the nature of the obstructions in Bayou Manchac, and the probable cost of removing them, which embraces all the information on the files of this bureau in relation thereto.

It will be perceived that this report and estimate is dated December 17, 1842; how the estimate will suit the present time is not in my power to say.

Respectfully, sir, your obedient servant,

J. J. ABERT,

Colonel Corps Topographical Engineers.

Hon. JOHN B. FLOYD,

Secretary of War.

MOBILE, ALABAMA, *December 17, 1842.*

COLONEL: I have the honor to submit the following report of my examination of Bayou Manchac. The resolution of the Senate of the United States, requiring the examination, appears to have reference only to the obstruction at the head of Bayou Manchac, on the Mississippi, about fourteen miles below Baton Rouge. It consists of a dam of earth, in continuation of the levee on the bank of the river, wide enough for a carriage way, for which purpose it is used. The bed of the bayou, between the dam and the river, a distance of about one hundred yards, has been filled up to within five or six feet of the banks by deposits made during high water in the Mississippi.

The legislature of Louisiana passed an act in March, 1826, authorizing the inhabitants of the adjacent parishes to close the bayou. The funds for the purpose were raised by subscription. The sole object contemplated by the legislature in granting the authority was, if I am correctly informed, to protect against overflow valuable lands on the bayou and the back lands of river plantations, which were inundated when the Mississippi reached a high stage of water. The cost of removing the obstructions in question would not exceed fifty dollars. A narrow trench cut through the deposit outside of the dam, and an opening in high water in the dam itself, would be sufficient to cause its removal effectually.

The resolution of the Senate concludes with the following words, viz: "and opening said bayou for navigation," from which it might be inferred that it had been customary to pass through it to and from the Mississippi river. I cannot learn that this has been the case, except in a few instances during the occupation of Louisiana by Spain, and during the embargo, when small boats ascended to the river. It will be perceived, from a brief description, that the dam at the head of the bayou is not the only obstruction to navigation, and that in estimating the cost of opening for that purpose the removal of said dam would form the most insignificant item.

Bayou Manchac, for six miles from the Mississippi, is extremely crooked, has an average breadth between the tops of the banks of about

fourteen yards, and is nearly dry. The *banks* (which have a slope of about forty) and the *bed* are grown up with young timber. Eight miles from the Mississippi, Bayou Crocodile enters it from the south. This bayou in high stages of water, before Manchac was closed, carried the river water into Lac Espagnol, overflowing lands almost to New river. The same lands are now drained by it into Manchac. About a mile below Bayou Crocodile, enters Bayou Fontaine from the north; after receiving the latter, Bayou Manchac becomes thirty yards wide, and from seven to ten feet deep. From Bayou Fontaine to the confluence of Manchac and the Amite river, a distance of ten or twelve miles, there is much fallen timber in the stream, and many leaning trees on the banks. This is the only navigable part of the Bayou Manchac; it may be cleaned out and made practicable for schooners at a cost of \$6,000. In this estimate is included the removal of timber from the banks for a space of forty feet in breadth.

In February, 1835, the legislature of Louisiana passed an act to inquire into the expediency of opening at the former mouth, or any other point, an outlet from the Mississippi into Bayou Manchac. I have not been able to procure the report on the subject, but it may be supposed that it was found to be inexpedient, as the bayou remained closed. While it continues so, it serves, with Bayous Fontaine and Crocodile, to drain extensive tracts of sugar land, which can be brought under cultivation without the necessity of making levees.

If the Mississippi water were admitted freely into Bayou Manchac, the lands on those bayous would greatly depreciate in value, and the most serious injury to the plantations on the river south of Manchac would ensue. The navigation would be of no public utility if all the trees, logs, and stumps, were cleared out; no boats of any description now used on the Mississippi could pass through the upper portion of it. If it possessed the requisite breadth, the impetuosity of the current would present a sufficient objection. That it would be vastly more rapid than the current of the river will be seen on inspection of the map of Louisiana, and a comparison of the distances to tide-water by the river and the bayou; the bed of the bayou at its head, being about fifteen feet above low-water mark in the river, no water would enter it during several months of the year.

To reopen the bayou would inflict serious injury upon the inhabitants residing near it, perhaps occasion a controversy between the general government and the State of Louisiana, and yet be productive of no advantage to the public that I can perceive. I would, therefore, respectfully recommend that the obstruction at the former entrance from the Mississippi into Bayou Manchac be not removed.

The cost of reopening and cleaning out the bayou from the Mississippi to the Amite river would amount to \$13,000.

I have the honor to be, sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

T. B. LINNARD,

Captain of Topographical Engineers.

Col. J. J. ABERT,

Colonel Corps of Topographical Engineers,

Washington City.

